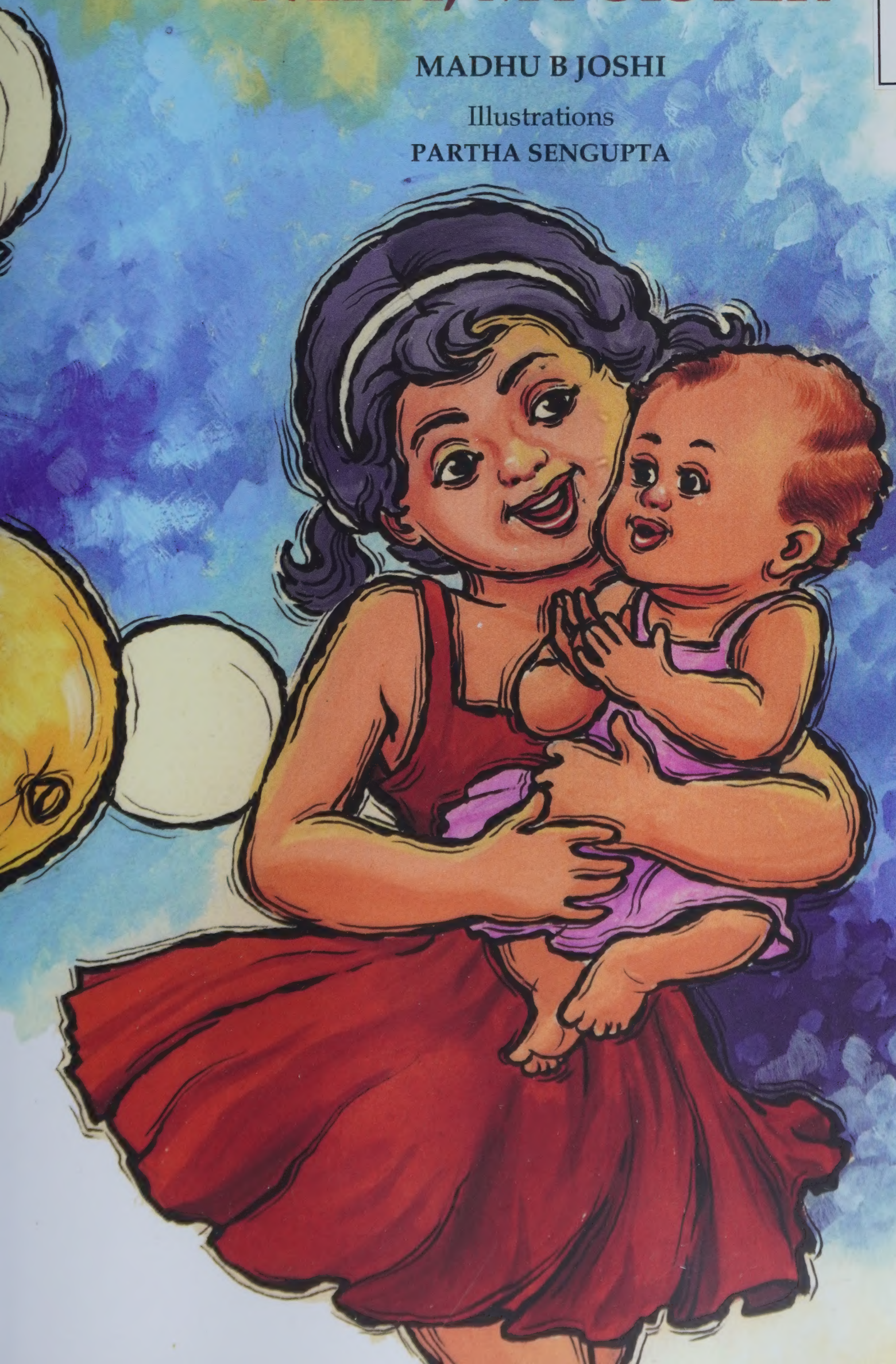


NEHA, MY SISTER

MADHU B JOSHI

Illustrations
PARTHA SENGUPTA



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Papa woke me up early one morning.

"Get up my child, open your eyes, it is already morning."

Where is Ma? She wakes me up everyday. Then what has happened to her today?

"Papa, where is Ma?"

"Ma is in the hospital," replied Papa.

One goes to the hospital when sick. Hospital means painful injections and bitter pills. Ma is in the hospital. She must be sick. I cried loudly, "Bring Ma home!"

Papa laughed, "Don't cry Preety."

"How will I go to school?"

"I will dress you up, Preety. I will drop you to school," Papa was still smiling.



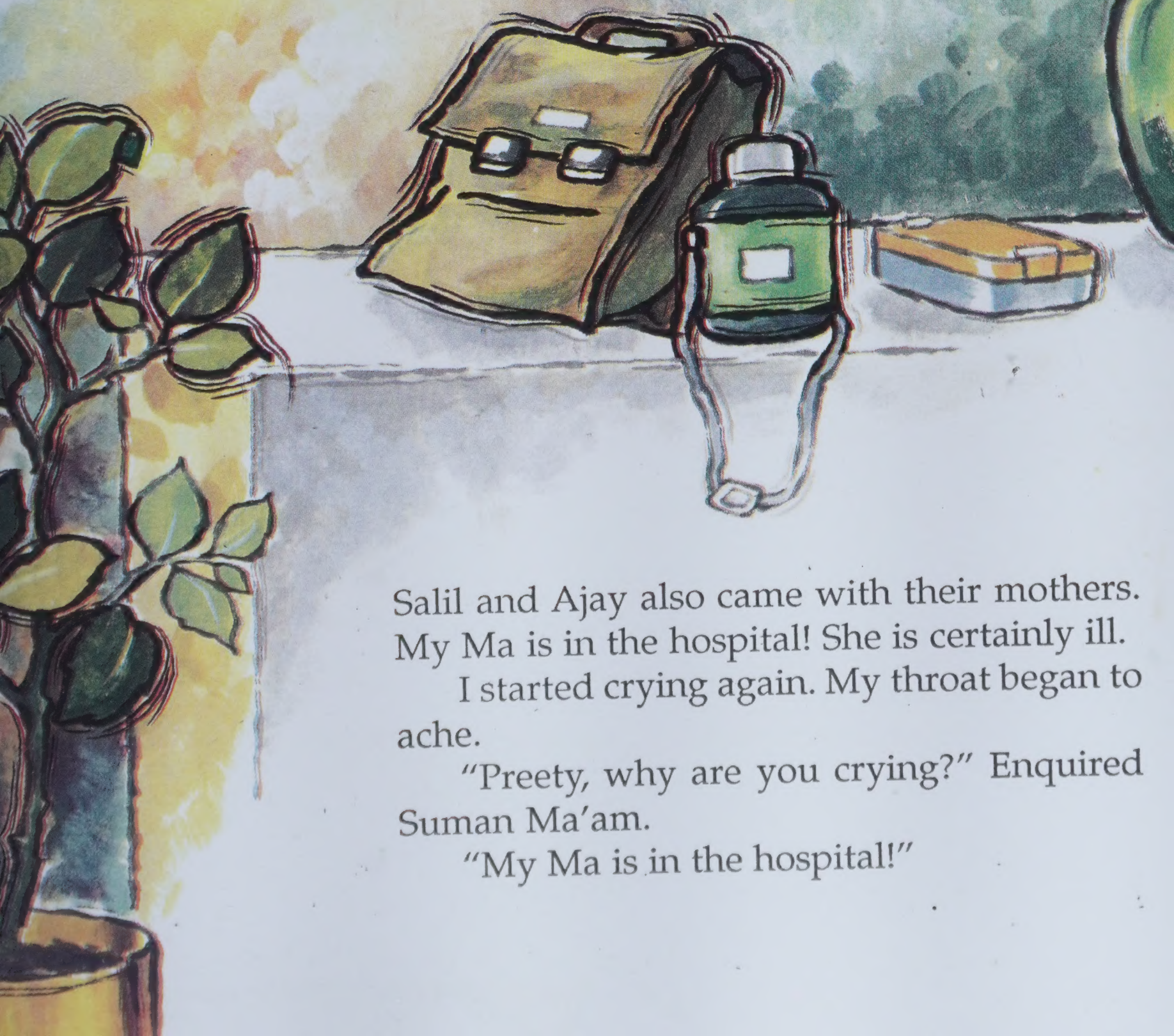




Papa dressed me up that day. He helped me put on the shoes and combed my hair.

He also gave me chapatties and lots of pickle. He did not even force me to drink milk. My Papa! My loving Papa!

Papa dropped me to school. Ritu had come with her mother. Minu came with her mother.



Salil and Ajay also came with their mothers. My Ma is in the hospital! She is certainly ill.

I started crying again. My throat began to ache.

"Preety, why are you crying?" Enquired Suman Ma'am.

"My Ma is in the hospital!"

Suman Ma'am lives in front of my house. On hearing this Ma'am laughed, "Don't cry Preety, your mother is alright."

If Ma is all right, then why is she in the hospital? Why did Papa and Suman Ma'am laugh?

Tnnnnn...tnnnnn...tnnnnn... went the bell. It was lunch break. Ritu said to me, "Your mother will bring a sister for you from the hospital. You get children from the hospital, small small children." Salil added, "My mother brought a brother from the hospital."

"But my Granny did not bring any thing for me from the hospital!" Minu complained.







What will Ma bring, brother or sister?

After school got over, Papa came to pick me up. "Papa, what has Ma brought for me? Brother or sister?" I asked.

"Ma has brought a sister for you," Papa was very glad.

"Shall we go to see my sister?"

"We shall go in the evening," answered Papa.

For lunch, Papa prepared fried rice with lots of peas. I also ate lots of halwa. Then I slept.

In the evening, I wore my favourite red frock. Papa combed my hair and we left for the hospital.

Ma was lying on a couch in a big room. There was a small cradle beside her bed. In the cradle was, my sweet, little sister. She had a small pink face. Tiny black eyes. And, small, small hairs. But she cried loudly, "Oaanv, oaanv!"



"Shall I take the baby in my lap?" I asked Ma.

"Not now, she is very small," Papa advised.

"Let her grow up a little, then you shall take her," said Ma.

"What will you name her?" Papa asked me.

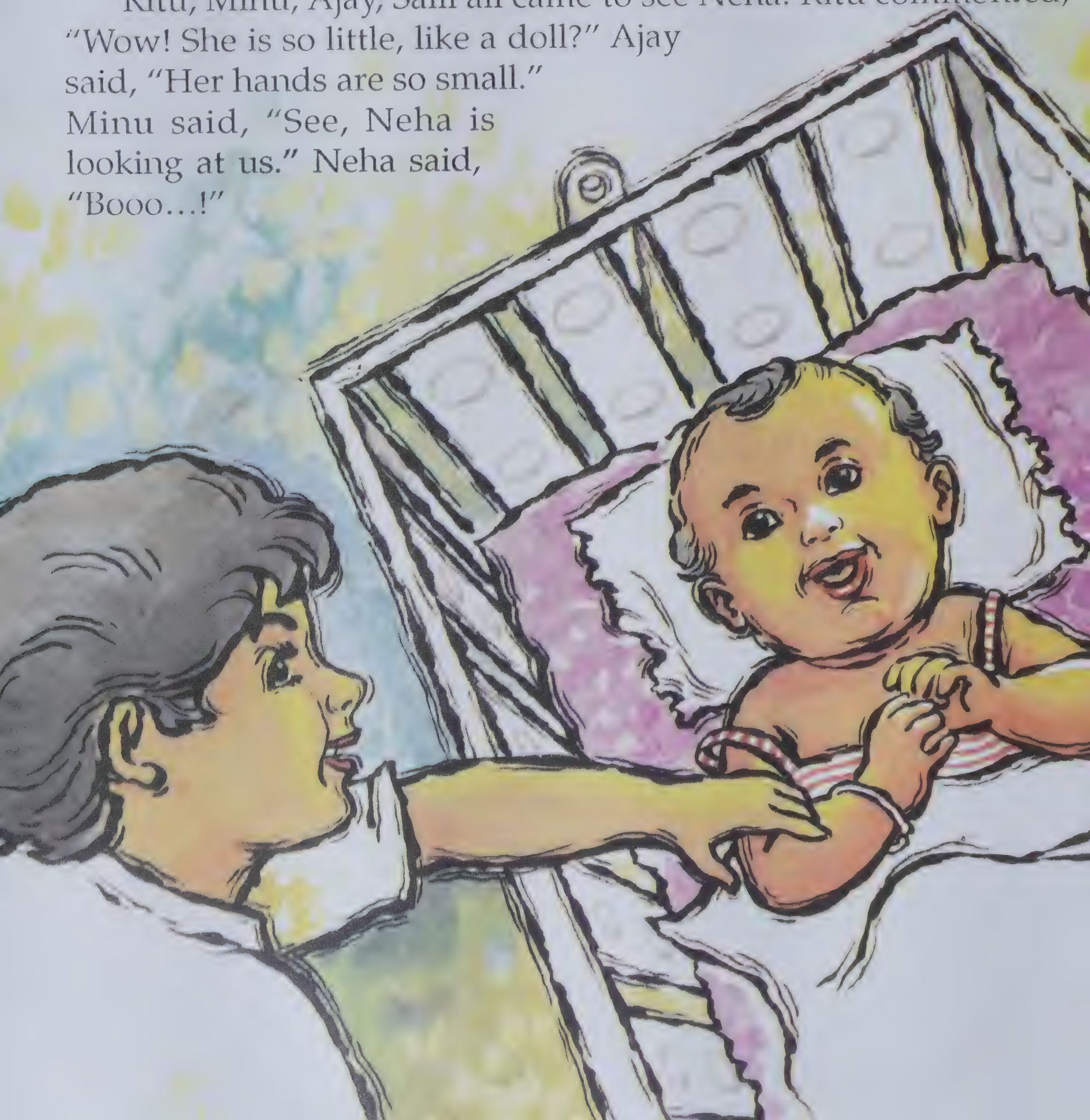
I gave it a thought and announced, "Neha."

On Sunday, we brought Ma and Neha home.

Ritu, Minu, Ajay, Salil all came to see Neha. Ritu commented, "Wow! She is so little, like a doll?" Ajay said, "Her hands are so small."

Minu said, "See, Neha is looking at us." Neha said,

"Booo...!"







Salil said, "Hey she does not have any teeth. Old lady!" Everybody laughed.

"Newly born children do not have teeth," stated Ma.

I love my young sister Neha very much. I am her elder sister. Her didi. Now, I have started taking her in my lap as well. When I play rattle, she laughs a lot. I also sing her songs. When I return after school, Neha says, "Vau uvau!" I know the meaning. She says, "My didi has come." Neha speaks a different language.

Neha drinks milk from a bottle. Sometimes Ma lets me feed milk to her. Neha is becoming naughty. She makes bubbles of milk



by making a sound 'foo....' When I kiss her, she smiles. Whenever I swing her in the cradle, the bell attached to it rings. The sound stirs all. The flowers, the fish and the birds.

I slowly sing with Ma:

*Sleep my doll sleep
On red cradle you sleep
The moon will shine in your dream
With chocolates full of milk and cream...*







Neha closes her eyes. Suddenly she smiles. Finally my sister Neha goes to sleep.





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